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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Declassify on \_\_\_\_\_ Reason \_\_\_\_\_

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

From: Cyrus Vance

Subject: The President's Interest in Argentine  
Human Rights Improvements

After consulting with our Embassy in Buenos Aires as you requested on the President's behalf, we do not believe that this is the right time to use the President's name publicly in connection with the human rights situation in Argentina. An exchange of messages with the Embassy on this subject is attached.

The Embassy points out three recent, very negative developments in the Buenos Aires region:

-- Eight lawyers or their wives have been kidnapped at a sea resort near Buenos Aires; one has been murdered brutally. It seems likely that the security forces are responsible.

-- The publisher of the only major Argentine newspaper which has demonstrated consistent courage on behalf of human rights is once more being held incommunicado.

-- At least five labor leaders have been warned recently to leave Argentina. (Earlier this month a prominent Jewish leader fled to the United States after being threatened.)

With respect to human rights improvements, the Embassy has been unable to verify whether more than three of 342 persons were released by the Argentine government in June. We do not doubt that many more were released but note that on July 1, the Interior Ministry announced 114 arrests under the state of siege provisions of the Argentine constitution and only 5 releases for the preceding week. There is

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also no further information concerning the restoration of the "right of option", whereby state of seige prisoners may seek voluntary exile.

Our Embassy is looking further into these matters and we will keep the National Security Council advised.

Nearly all serious violations of human rights in Argentina are now taking place in the Buenos Aires military region. The commander of the region, General Suarez Mason, is a notorious hardline general, and viewed as one of Argentine President Videla's principal rivals for power; Suarez is seconded by a retired General, who acts as governor. These men are being held responsible by many for the latest round of violence. In fact, Argentina's most important newspaper, La Nacion, which has not distinguished itself on behalf of human rights, called unequivocally on July 18 for the Argentine government to protect lawyers from barbarism.

There are also signs that President Videla may be gaining support from other generals for a greater ventilation of political ideas with civilian leaders. This prompted Argentina's oldest party, the Radicales, to criticize the government's human rights record. The Radicales were accused of engaging in politics by the government but rather than punish the politicians, the government took the case to the courts. The lower courts ruled against the government and the matter is under appeal.

We will remain alert for favorable developments, as the President has directed, to express his gratification. We do feel, however, that we need a more clear cut step to applaud, such as a court decision accepted by the government or the restoration of the "right of option".

Attachments:

1. State 162292 dated July 12, 1977.
2. Buenos Aires 5305 dated July 18, 1977.

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D/HA: OJones (dra

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